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ABSTRACT

This paper illustrates the application of the collaborative problem solving process for academic and behavioral remediation for students experiencing low reading achievement and some behavioral problems. Unlike the traditional psychoeducational process in which the relationship between the school psychologist and the teacher is that of consultant and consultee, this approach establishes a reciprocal, interdependent working partnership. On the basis of this cooperative association, a mutually agreed upon curriculum-based intervention plan was devised and implemented for a second-grade student who concomitantly demonstrated behavioral problems. Results of the intervention show that the student's reading ability and his desire to pay attention during class time increased, while his off-task and disruptive behaviors decreased. (MKA)

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The Collaborative Problem Solving Process:

Academic and Behavioral Intervention

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The Collaborative Problem Solving Process: Academic and Behavioral Intervention

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This article illustrates the application of the collaborative problem solving process for academic and behavioral remediation for a student experiencing low reading achievement and some behavioral problems. Unlike the traditional psycheducational process in which the relationship between the school psychologist and teacher is that of consultant and consultee, in this approach a reciprocal, interdependent working partnership is established. On the basis of this cooperative association a mutually agreed upon curriculum-based assessment reading intervention plan was devised and implemented for a second grade student who concomitantly demonstrated behavioral problems.

Overview

The case of a second grade poor reader who demonstrated behavioral and academic problems is presented for the purpose of demonstrating the effectiveness of the collaborative problem solving and curriculum-based assessment (CBA) approaches for devising and implementing a sound intervention plan. These processes are employed as pre-referral remediation techniques with the goal of engendering success for students at risk for failure in the classroom (Rios et al, 1997). Emphasis is placed on the formation of a cooperative, reciprocal, and interdependent partnership between the parties involved (e.g., teacher and school psychologist). In addition, problem clarification

and analysis, the exploration of plausible alternative interventions, selection of the intervention, and its implementation, evaluation, and follow-up are also characteristic of the collaborative problem solving process (Zins & Erchul, 1995).

CBA is defined as "a system for determining the instruction needs of a student based upon the student's on-going performance within existing course content in order to deliver instruction as efficiently as possible" (Gickling, Shane, & Croskery, 1989). Additionally, CBA serves as an educational evaluation technique which functions to promote student "referral, screening, classification, instructional planning, and progress (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1985). Unlike traditional evaluation procedures, CBA employs a specific classroom's curriculum to advance successful learning Because CBA aligns assessment practices with what is actually taught in the classroom, the exact nature of the student's problem can be directly accessed as well as the student's progress toward the attainment of instructional goals. Moreover, CBA seeks to create optimal cindtions for teaching and learning since instruction is delivered on the entry level skills of students with an appropriate level of challenge and a realistic opportunity for success on a frequent and continuous basis (Glickling & Rosenfeld, 1995).

In the case presented, the methods of the collaborative problem solving process and curriculum-based assessment are employed as viable alternatives to the academic and behavioral evaluation procedures used in the traditional psychoeducational model.

The Case of Patrick

Patrick is a 7 year, 11-month old boy was educationally placed in a regular second grade class in his neighborhood's public school. His teacher reported that he was an

average student with the exception of his reading ability. He was considered a low achiever in reading. She had devised several hypotheses about his low reading achievement. For instance, it might be attributed to his general dislike for reading, problems attending to tasks that required him to maintain focus (e.g., reading), or the possibility that the instability of his home life was negatively impacting on his learning ability.

Collaborative Problem Solving.

I arranged a one hour meeting with the teacher so that I could discuss with her the *collaborative problem solving process* and my need to collect baseline data in terms of Patrick's reading ability and attention problems prior to discussing possible intervention procedures. We agreed that the meeting would take place the next morning during her free time. It was decided that after our meeting I would remain in the classroom for an additional three-quarters of an hour to do a 15 minute systematic observation of Patrick's reading skill and behavior during his reading group time. This was to be followed by another 15 minute behavioral observation period during his regular class time. The remaining 15 minutes were allotted for me to interview Patrick and to collect baseline reading data.

During our meeting I discussed with the teacher my need to discuss the reading criteria used to determine Patrick's placement in her class' low reading group. She indicated that her "running record" assessment of Patrick's reading ability indicated that the material comprising the lower group's reading curriculum was what he was able to read without experiencing frustration. She also told me that in terms of reading

comprehension, Patrick showed good immediate recall; however, within a few days he had forgotten a lot of the story content, as well as vocabulary words that he might have learned.

I further indicated to the teacher that I would need to interview Patrick in an attempt to determine his feelings and opinions regarding his reading ability and lack of attending during class. At the same time, it was my intention to establish a comfortable repoire with him in the hopes of facilitating an effective working relationship over the next five weeks. I discussed with the teacher that, in terms of Patrick's reading skills, I would have to assess his ability through the process of curriculum based assessment (CBA). I explained this evaluation process to her. Furthermore, I indicated to her that after I completed my functional analysis of Patrick's reading group behavior and class time behavioral interactions, that she and I would have to engage in brainstorming to come up with various possible interventions designed to resolve, or at least, curtail many behaviors caused by his attentional problems. Implementation of choice of intervention would take place during the five weeks that I would be working with her and Patrick. If it proved unsuccessful we would implement anotner intervention. If successful, she might opt to maintain it for the duration of the academic school year.

Finally I discussed with the teacher the need for us to establish a cooperative partnership based upon mutual respect for each other's position, as well as our shared and unique responsibilities in terms of this collaborative problem solving process. I explained the reciprocal trust we needed to maintain throughout this process concerning our joint efforts to work toward the common goal of increasing Patrick's reading ability, while decreasing his off-task behaviors. The teacher liked the idea of participating in this

type of working relationship.

We agreed that the first aim in our collaborative problem solving relationship was to simultaneously establish two goals. One was to clearly define, design and implement an intervention that would decrease Patrick's disruptive classroom behavior and enhance his ability to attend to the task at hand. A second aim was to devise and institute a reading intervention plan intended to improve his reading ability. To begin the process we decided that I should attend the next day's class to listen to Patrick's reading skill during his reading group time. After this I was to observe his behavior for 15 minutes during the remainder of his reading group time (a half-hour session), followed by another 15 minutes observation to assess his functioning in the classroom. It was agreed that while I was in the classroom observing, I would remain as unobtrusive as possible.

As planned, during the next day's lower reading group session I sat far enough away from the reading table so that the students would not be distracted by me, yet I was within a range that allowed me to clearly hear Patrick read. The teacher gave me a copy of the reading group book and indicated the lesson for the day. In this way I was able to follow along as the students read the material. She had several students read before she asked Patrick to read a short passage. This was because she wanted to make sure that my presence in the classroom had been accommodated by him, and hence he would not be distracted while he engaged in reading. As I listened to him read I noted that he made many word omission, substitutions, and word repetitions. His reading sounded very labored as he engaged in a lot of halted speech.

After observing Patrick's reading ability, I spent the next 15 minutes observing

his behavior reading group. This was followed by another 15 minutes observation of his behavior during his regular classroom time. Systematic observation was accomplished by the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC): Student Observation System. My observation of Patrick's behavior at his reading group table indicated that he had difficulty focusing his attention on the task at hand. On several occasions he did not seem to hear the teacher when she asked him questions about the story they were reading. He was reluctant to participate when the teacher asked him to read aloud. At the same time, he was easily distracted by what children who were not in his reading group were doing. The teacher called his name several times before he heard her and got back on task. During this time Patrick frequently rocked back and forth on his chair while looking around the room. After several minutes of this behavior the teacher said to him, "Sit up! Chairs are not for rocking". He would often talk to the student that sat next to him at the reading table, and a few times spoke with the student who sat directly opposite him. The teacher instructed Patrick to move his chair to the other side of the reading table. He complied with her request.

After reading group was over Patrick returned to his desk. I noticed that he frequently slouched in his chair, fidgeted, and kneeled on the chair seat. At times, without any provocation he would leave his seat and wander around the classroom. He would try to engage students in any type of conversation that maintained their attention. When reprimanded by the teacher he would return to his seat and hum or make other inappropriate noises.

After my half-hour systematic observation of Patrick, I approached him, introduced myself, and sat down beside him at his desk. I explained to him why I was

there and how I intended to work with him for the next five weeks. He told me that his father had told him that a lady was coming to help him with his reading. Patrick remained friendly and polite during the time I spoke with him. He seemed eager to work with me on improving his reading ability. We were very comfortable with each other and established an excellent rapport. I asked him if he had any suggestions that might help improve his reading. He said that sometimes he would like to read something that he found interesting instead of always having to read what he was told to read. I excused myself and approached the teacher with the idea of allowing him to select a book or story of his liking once a week. She thought it was a good idea as long as he was making continued progress with our reading intervention plan. I returned to his desk and told him that the teacher approved his idea as long as he was doing okay with our work. He was very pleased that his suggestions was accepted.

Patrick seemed to really like the special attention that he was receiving. I partially attributed this to the problems that he was experiencing at home. The teacher had told me during our initial meeting that until recently Patrick had been living with his father. Something transpired causing him to have to return to his mother's home. It was evident during my interview with Patrick that he missed his father very much. When my interview with Patrick was completed, the teacher and I agreed that I should return the next day 20 minutes prior to her free-time. This would allow me to collect baseline data regarding Patrick's reading ability. We decided that we would then spend her free-time period brainstorming some behavior interventions.

The following day during the teacher's free-time we brainstormed in order to determine an intervention procedure that might enhance Patrick's attending and decrease

his disruptive classroom behaviors. We worked toward our mutual goal by trying to clearly operationalize these problems. As previously discussed, quantification of these behaviors were readily achieved by using the BASC for a 30 minute systematic observation of his behavior during and after his reading group activity.

After discussing several behavior intervention approaches, the teacher and I decided that in Patrick's case the most effective approach would be to implement a multidimensional method. We believed this would be more effective because during my behavioral observations of him, it appeared that many of these behaviors (e.g., rocking back and forth in the chair, fidgeting) occurred directly before, during, and after his reading group session. We hypothesized that his lack of reading skill might cause him to feel self-conscious and anxious.

Behavioral intervention techniques.

We devised some techniques by which Patrick could control and monitor some of his own behaviors. Implementation of these were the responsibility of the teacher. I agreed to encourage him to engage in these behaviors when I worked with him over the next five weeks. We wrote down in outline form all of our jointly agreed upon objectives. We also clearly determined who was responsible for the various components of the intervention plan.

One method to increase his attention and decrease his disruptive behavior was the teacher writing some of his work assignments on the blackboard. In this way he could easily look there if he forgot what to do. In terms of assignments not listed on the blackboard, the teacher spoke with Patrick about waiting a little while before asking

her to repeat the assignment. In this way he might remember what she assigned. She also assigned Patrick a student peer whom he was allowed to ask about assignments and task directions in case he could not remember. At the same time, the teacher talked to him concerning his making a conscious effort to remember to raise his hand if he had a question or knew an answer to one instead of shouting it out in class.

Another strategy that the teacher implemented to help Patrick increase task focus, particularly if he found it challenging, was to explain to him that if he quietly talked himself through the assignment he might be able to perform it better. The intention was to help him focus on the task at hand and, at the same time, increase his self-control. If he succeeded in doing this he was encouraged to verbally reward himself for his accomplishment.

Finally, the teacher agreed that she would be responsible for approaching both of Patrick's parents in regards to their receiving some family counseling. She felt that after living with his father for several years having to relocate to his mother's home possibly confused him. She felt that family counseling might alleviate some of this upset, and help him cope with his new living arrangements.

The teacher agreed to accept and implement my suggestions regarding some environmental modifications that would help decrease Patrick's attentional and behavioral problems. I recommended that she move his desk away from the window and place him in an area where there were fewer distractions. I also suggested that she place his desk closer to hers. Since he had a tendency to be easily distracted (e.g., wandering around the room, fidgeting) this seating arrangement would be beneficial in fostering his attention. I further suggested that she might give him the opportunity to move around

between class activities particularly following tasks that required his concentration (e.g., reading). I recommended that she give him some errand to do or classroom jobs like erasing the blackboard. I told her that this might help him to feel needed, and hence increase his self-esteem. Finally, I asked her if she would post some rules about appropriate classroom behaviors so that Patrick could refer to them. For instance, she could put a picture on his desk of a child raising their hand. This would serve as a visual reminder for him to engage in this acceptable form of behavior in lieu of shouting out in class.

In terms of attending to academic tasks, I discussed with the teacher the benefits of breaking down large tasks into smaller ones so that Patrick might not feel so overwhelmed with long assignments. Also I indicated to her that while discussing assignments his attending might be facilitated if she stood by his desk and did not begin to give instructions until she knew that she had his full attention. I also recommended that if he had to participate in group learning it would be more beneficial for him to be a member of a small group. In this way he would not be so readily distracted. Finally, I suggested that she might try to schedule one of Patrick's preferred activities immediately after a less preferred one (i.e., reading group). This might help to maintain his focus and preclude him from engaging in disruptive types of behaviors.

Curriculum-based assessment procedures.

In terms of our second goal to devise and implement a reading intervention plan, we engaged in brainstorming with the intention of developing or selecting, what we believed would be, the best possible reading remediation technique for Patrick. After

discussing several viable alternatives like (e.g., Previewing, errors correction during oral reading) we agreed to implement the *Repeated Reading Methods* (Samuels, 1997). We choose this method even though we knew there would be a trade-off of accuracy for speed.

Acceptable word recognition accuracy for this method is generally ninety percent. We further liked the notion of a reading remediation technique that ameliorated laborious reading since this was a particular issue in Patrick's case. Furthermore, we liked this method because motivation is generally enhanced. That is, with each repeated reading fewer word recognition errors are made, while at the same time, reading rate increases. Hence, frequent success is experienced and this in turn engenders a sense of reading competence.

We decided that a CBA approach was going to be used in our reading intervention plan. We agreed that selected passages from Patrick's reading group books would provide the best material for evaluating his reading because it afforded a more accurate description of his reading ability relative to his class peers. It was also determined that the teacher would be responsible for selecting the reading passages that were to be used for the five weeks of the Repeated Reading Methods intervention process. We concurred that in Patrick's case 80 words per minute (WPM) with three or fewer errors was a satisfactory reading fluency goal. We also decided that it would not be unreasonable to expect him to acquire, at least, two new words per minute per week over the five weeks session. This would increase his vocabulary by ten or more words. It was determined that it was my responsibility when I worked with him to record the speed at

which he read, and to note the types of reading errors that he made. It was also my responsibility to plot on a graph each sessions results. In this way intervention effectiveness could be readily determined and Patrick could see his reading progress. We thought this might provide an excellent motivational device for him because it would visually depict his reading achievement. We also hoped that success would lead to a heightened sense of personal confidence on his part. As agreed, Patrick was allowed to select a passage to read to me at the completion of each Repeated Readings Methods session. Finally, we decided that it was the teacher's responsibility to inform Patrick's parents concerning the status of his progress on a weekly basis.

Because of the nature of the collaborative problem solving method, I knew that the teacher and I had to jointly outline all the aspects of the reading intervention plan that we were devising for Patrick. It had to be written in such a way that we both could clearly understand our personal responsibilities in terms of data collection, record keeping, and monitoring Patrick's weekly progress. Included in the outline was our agreement to meet for one-half hour each Friday morning after my session with Patrick so that we could discuss his progress or lack of it. If progress was not be obtaining then we concurred to discontinue our chosen intervention and implement another one in its place.

Baseline data collected prior to implementation of the Repeated Readings Methods demonstrated that Patrick read 61 WPM with one error and achieved 100% comprehension. After this was established, I gave Patrick an 80 word preselected passage to read out of his reading group's reading book. Baseline data for this was 66 WPM with three errors. Patrick continued to read this passage until he reached our predetermined satisfactory level of fluency (i.e., 80 WPM with three or fewer errors). When his fluency

level was reached, Patrick moved on to the next preselected passage in his reading group's book. Baseline data for that passage revealed that he was able to read 68 WPM with four errors. He continued to read this passage until satisfactory fluency was achieved. This Repeated Readings Methods was implemented throughout the five weeks period. Patrick began this reading intervention procedure reading 63 correct WPM (refer to Table 1).

The teacher and I decided during our initial meeting to allow Patrick the option of selecting a reading incentive. This enabled him to make a choice in terms of his school work and it also communicated to him that we had faith in his ability. We felt that showing him this respect did not impinge on the teacher's role in any way. At the same time, it afforded Patrick the opportunity to actively participate in his learning experience. He indicated that he wanted a dinosaur sticker book. It was agreed by Patrick, the teacher, and myself that if he met the Repeated Readings Methods criteria he could remove one dinosaur sticker from the sticker sheet and place it in its appropriate place in the sticker book. We also agreed with Patrick that if he was able to beat his last score, as a further incentive he was given the option of selecting two dinosaurs and placing them in his sticker book.

As can be seen by the Aimline chart (refer to Table 1) our Repeated Readings Methods intervention was successful in increasing Patrick's reading fluency to 73 WPM (as reflected in our last session's score). However, his average fluency at the end of the five weeks was 68 WPM. The teacher and I agreed that this increase achieved via two, one-half hour sessions per week over five weeks was a noteworthy gain. It reflected a 12 word increase relative to his baseline score prior to instituting the Repeated Readings

Methods (i.e., 61 WPM). Patrick was also pleased and impressed by his progress.

According to Shinn, (1995) in order to be promoted to the higher reading group during the second-half of the school term a student would have to consistently read in the range of 75 to 145 WPM with 90% accuracy and 85% comprehension. Patrick achieved 73 WPM during the five week intervention process, and hence did not qualify to be promoted to the higher reading group (i.e., a minimum of 75 WPM). Our goal of having Patrick acquire two new words per minute per week was not quite obtained. Over the course of the five weeks Patrick acquired nine new vocabulary words. This did not meet our criterion goal of ten new words. Also, he did not learn these at our criterion rate of two new vocabulary words per session. Hence, acquisition of these words was not consistent from week to week. However, this reflected a 90% increase in vocabulary words. Patrick, as well as the teacher and I were pleased with this outcome.

Besides increasing Patrick's reading fluency we wanted to enhance his reading articulation. This was because during my initial observation of his reading it sounded very labored. At the same time, I also noted that he read in a very passive and monotone manner. As part of our goal to increase Patrick's reading fluency we wanted to teach him to read actively. We decided that we could possibly accomplish this by having him read in a type of rhythmic fashion. I discussed with the teacher a notion that might help him understand how we wanted his reading to flow. She agreed and we decided that it was my responsibility to convey this to him. As previously mentioned, the Repeated Readings Methods facilitated this process.

Rhythmic reading was accomplished when I told Patrick a tale about the ancient

storytellers. I told him that it was their job to go from town to town spreading the news by means of stories. I told him that these storytellers need to get people's attention. To do this they had to make sure that they told their stories in a very enthusiastic and lively way. I explained to him that the reason there used to be storytellers was because there was no newspapers, radios or televisions to let people know what was happening. Patrick was fascinated by this historical account. I encouraged him to perceive of himself as an ancient storyteller. As such, it was his task to read in such a way that information contained within a passage had to be conveyed in the form of a message to be shared with others. It was his job to make sure that others wanted to listen to what he had to say. This idea really motivated him and he enthusiastically engaged in this role. It was remarkable to witness how almost instantaneously his reading became more articulate and almost effortless. The teacher and I agreed that this was probably the first time Patrick ever really enjoyed reading.

Patrick did not hesitate to let us know how thrilled he was with his new reading ability. He was so proud of himself that as he refined his "storytelling" skill over the five weeks time frame, he read his passages aloud at a volume that enabled his peers to hear him. Since my meetings with Patrick occurred during the other students' free-time period the teacher did not try to discourage him from engaging in this behavior. In fact, she indicated that she delighted in watching his confidence and listening to his animated reading. Of course, the teacher and I made it clear to Patrick that his job as a storyteller occurred only during this specific time period, his reading group time, and any other time that he engaged in reading outside of the classroom where reading aloud was permitted (e.g., at home).

It was agreed that at the conclusion of our five week collaborative problem solving process that I should remain an extra 15 minutes to engage in another systematic observation of Patrick's behavior. The aim was to determine if our multimodal behavioral intervention plan had been effective. Hence, after my last Repeated Readings Methods intervention with Patrick, I remained an additional 15 minutes in the classroom to observe his regular class time behavior. I recorded my observations on a Functional Behavioral Assessment Matrix form. This assessment indicated that Patrick still engaged in some off-task and disruptive behaviors; however, there was a decrease in their rate and magnitude as compared to that prior to implementation of our intervention. The teacher and I concurred that Patrick's behavior had become more appropriate and he maintained task focus better.

Summary

In conclusion, the teacher, Patrick and I believed that our reading and behavioral interventions were successful. Patrick's reading fluency was, on the average 68 WPM, with a 10 WPM increase relative to the baseline data collected at the first session of the five weeks Repeated Readings Methods intervention plan. His reading had become much more articulate, and he had increased his vocabulary by nine words. This reflected a 90% increase based on our objective of a 10 word acquisition rate over the five weeks of reading remediation. His ability, and equally important, his desire to pay attention during class time had increased while his off-task and disruptive behaviors concomitantly decreased. The teacher assured me that she would continue to institute our multi-dimensional behavioral intervention strategies for the remainder of the school year. She also indicated that she would try to allocate some time each week to continue the

Repeated Readings Methods remediation technique with Patrick.

The teacher invited me to attend her class one day in June (prior to the last day of class) so that I could do a follow-up observation in terms of the continued effectiveness that these interventions had on Patrick's reading and behavioral progress. At the end of my last session with Patrick I asked him several questions about what he thought of our working relationship and the things that we had accomplished. Without hesitation he told me, "My favorite thing to do now is read. Well, that and soccer".

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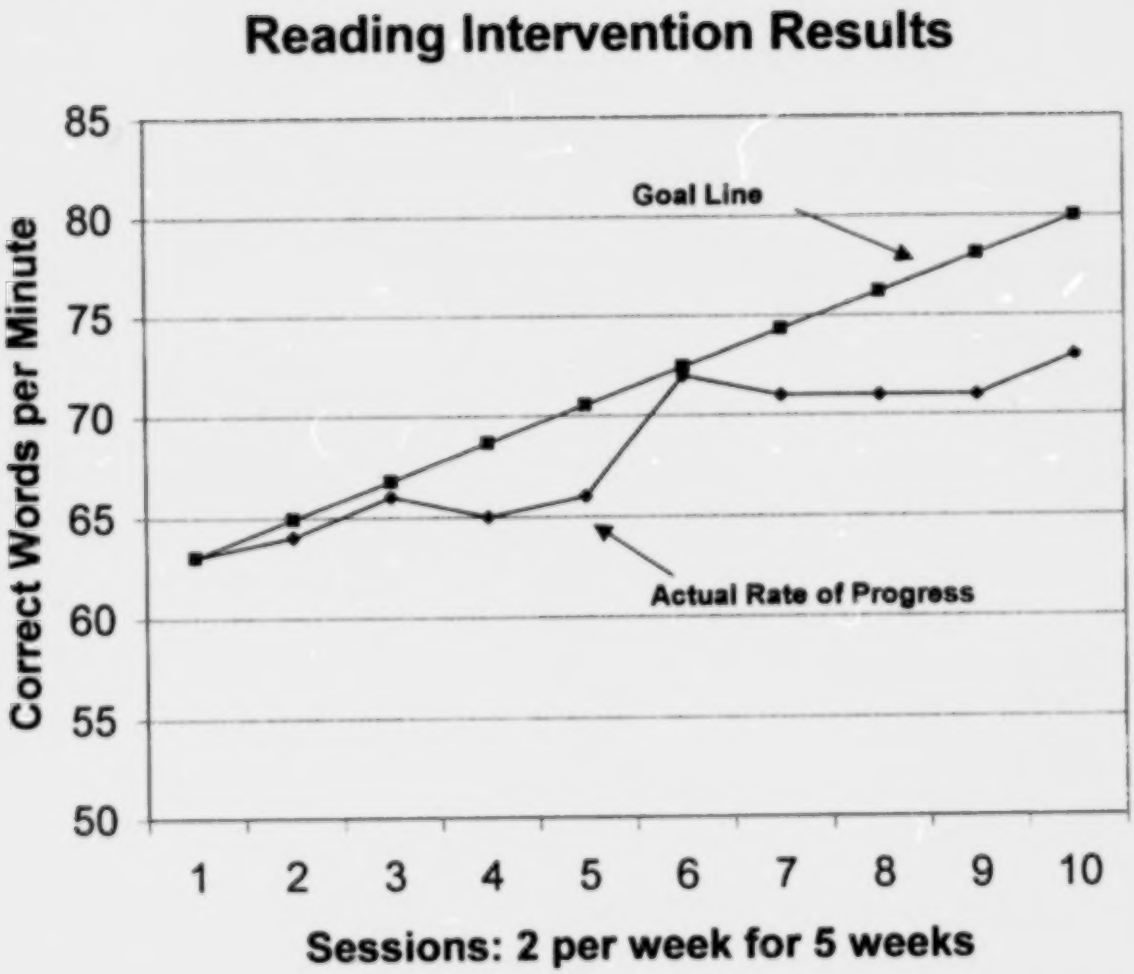
Table 1


Reading Intervention Results
Correct Words per Minute
85
80
75
70
65
60
55
50
Goal Line
Actual Rate of Progress
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
Sessions: 2 per week for 5 weeks